

PINK, SAM

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At: 075-F

Artists of Abraham Lincoln portraits

Sam Fink

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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REINVENTING LINCOLN

AT Gettysburg, a hundred and thirty-one years ago, Abraham Lincoln distilled the meaning of the Civil War into two hundred and seventy-two words. His famous speech is chiselled in limestone on the south wall of a shrine on the Potomac devoted to his worship. But the Gettysburg Address is not our Sermon on the Mount. From beginning to end, it is tragically paradoxical. It is a credo of filial piety, the act of reverence being the sacrifice of thousands of sons in the name of the fathers' unfulfilled ideals. The blood of the fallen and the holiness of the past are mixed to produce "a new birth of freedom."

It is altogether fitting that every age has its own vision of Lincoln. Just as there must be "a new nation," there must be a new Lincoln. But every age differs from every other, as the former University of Virginia historian Merrill D. Peterson observes in "Lincoln in American Memory." For the post-Civil War generation, Lincoln was Christ, dying for our sins. At the same time, he was the godhead of the Republican Party. During the "return to normalcy" in the twenties, the freethinking Lincoln, who never belonged to any church, was cast as a devout Christian. By the end of the thirties, the poet Carl Sandburg had created a multi-volume biography of the democratic idealist suitable for the New Deal. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he cited the Great Emancipator. In the last several years, however, Lincoln has been accused by some black historians of being a white supremacist and by some psychobiographers of engaging in patricide: Slick Abe and Sick Abe. But the majestic Lincoln has endured, and is captured in this illustration of the berobed sixteenth President by Sam Fink, whose book "The Illustrated Gettysburg Address" will be published by Random House on the anniversary date—November 19th.

"What would Lincoln do?" was a favorite essay question for students of generations past. But in a campaign season whose chief element is the exploitation of anger there seems to be little room for even a grace note.

In the conservative book of the moment, "The Bell Curve," Charles Murray and the late Richard J. Herrnstein claim that blacks, on average, have lower intellectual capabilities, and that therefore government programs to ameliorate inequality will be fruitless. What would Lincoln do? In his debates with Stephen A. Douglas, when both men were running for the Senate in 1858, Lincoln implored the voters "to discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man—this race and that race and the other race as being inferior." This was an argument, Lincoln maintained, that was used only to prevent the promise of equal opportunity from being spread "to all people of all colors everywhere."

In California, Proposition 187 would deny basic health, welfare, and education services to illegal immigrants and their children—the latest manifestation of the nativism that in Lincoln's day was expressed in the Know-Nothing Party. "I am not a Know-Nothing," Lincoln wrote his friend Joshua Speed in 1855. "That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that '*all men are created equal*.' We now practically read it '*all men are created equal, except negroes*.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read '*all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics*.' When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy." Read briskly, that passage might fit into a thirty-second spot.

Throughout the Civil War, Lincoln mobilized every national resource but hatred. Lincoln was not an otherworldly saint, too good for this earth. He was as ambitious a politician as has ever held the Presidency. Cheap anger, especially when dedicating a cemetery, would have been an easy currency. But his grasp of the conflict went far beyond hostility. His idea of the Union was transcendent.

—SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL



Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not

consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



Abraham Lincoln drawn by Sam Fink. Every age finds the man it needs in the sixteenth President.

Fink, Sam

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JACKSON, THOMAS J.
"STONEWALL"

DRAWER 17A

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